

Validation of picture story book “Tubuhku Berharga” as sexual education media for preschoolers

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ABSTRACT

Children and teenagers are at risk of being sexually abused targeted or performing risky sexual behavior. Appropriate sex education from their closest environment presented by parents or teachers is in demand. However, parents and teachers have limitations in giving sex education, especially in early childhood. Even though workshops or training for improving parents' knowledge and skills are effective, specifically designed education tools are needed to support parents and teachers in disseminating sexuality topics for kids. This research aimed to validate the picture storybook “Tubuhku Berharga” specially designed for preschoolers in two consecutive procedures. First, the content validation process to evaluate the design's relevance and appropriateness. Next, a quasi-experiment protocol as an empirical validation process was conducted following the content validation. A one-group pretest-posttest design was used in a local kindergarten. The result demonstrated that the picture storybook “Tubuhku Berharga” is valid as a supporting tool in teaching sexuality matters to preschoolers. We suggested constructing other visual media with other topics in sexuality health, such as reproduction and body image that are age-suitable for preschoolers.

Key Words: multimedia, parent's involvement, picture storybook, preschoolers, sex education

ABSTRAK

Validasi buku cerita bergambar “Tubuhku Berharga” sebagai media pendidikan seksual untuk anak usia prasekolah.

Anak-anak merupakan subjek rentan pada kasus kekerasan seksual atau perilaku seks berisiko. Pendidikan seks yang memadai dari lingkungan terdekat seperti orangtua dan guru sangat diperlukan. Meski demikian, orangtua dan guru memiliki keterbatasan dalam memberikan pendidikan seks, utamanya pada anak usia dini. Meskipun lokakarya ataupun pelatihan untuk meningkatkan pengetahuan dan keterampilan orangtua dinilai efektif, namun diperlukan adanya alat peraga edukasi yang secara spesifik dirancang untuk menyampaikan topik pendidikan seks bagi anak-anak. Riset ini bertujuan untuk memvalidasi buku cerita bergambar “Tubuhku Berharga” yang dirancang untuk anak usia prasekolah dengan dua prosedur. Pertama, proses memvalidasi isi untuk mengevaluasi desain, relevansi, dan kesesuaian. Berikutnya, sebuah protokol kuasi eksperimen dilaksanakan untuk menilai validasi empirik. Desain kuasi eksperimen yang digunakan adalah *one-group pretest-posttest design* di sebuah taman kanak-kanak setempat. Hasil studi menunjukkan bahwa buku cerita bergambar “Tubuhku Berharga” valid untuk digunakan sebagai alat bantu edukasi seks pada anak usia prasekolah. Bentuk alat peraga edukasi seks lain yang mencakup topik seperti reproduksi dan citra tubuh yang sesuai dengan usia juga diperlukan.

Kata kunci: anak prasekolah, buku cerita bergambar, keterlibatan orangtua, multimedia, pendidikan seks

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INTRODUCTION

Children and teenagers tend to perform sexual-risky behaviors or become susceptible subject of sexual abuse due to their limitation in proper knowledge about sexual health [1] [2]. The Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection (Kemen PPA Republik Indonesia) reported that there were 8.699 cases of sexual abuse towards children in 2021 and 9.588 cases in 2022. Those cases had long-term negative consequences in physical, psychological, and social aspects of one’s life [3], [4], [5]. It is reasonable to prevent those cases from happening by providing appropriate sex education for young people. Sex education is not limited to providing accurate information about an individual’s anatomy and physiology of sex and reproduction organs. Moreover, it should cover broader topics such as healthy sexual development, gender identity, interpersonal relationships, affection, intimacy, body image, and values about consent to develop healthy sexuality [6]. This information should be delivered step by step depending on the individual’s needs and cognitive development. As other educational themes, it can be taught through 3 learning domains: cognitive (information), affective (feeling, values, attitudes), and behavioral (communication, decision making).

Typically, sexual education at school is conducted in the secondary level and high school, or at the fifth and sixth grade earliest [7]. However, current studies suggest an urgent requirement to establish effective sex education as early as possible [2], [8], [9]. This is because the sexual abuse threat to children at an early age is greater. It is reported by SIMFONI-PPA that the victims of abuse at the age range 0-5 years old were 1,944 children in 2021 and increase to 2,024 in 2022. It can be inferred that children are susceptible subject of sexual abuse due to their limitation in proper knowledge about sex health and safety.

Basically, parents have the opportunity as primary educators in sexual matters for their children. However, myriad factors including cultural values, limitation of knowledge, skill, and comfort in communicating sexual topics with children may inhibit parents from doing so [10], [11], [12]. Organizing parent workshops was one of the proven methods for

improving specific knowledge and skills in order to enhance parents' participation in giving sexual education [2], [13]. In addition, some conducted guidance for parents and teachers demonstrated effectiveness as sexuality education approach targeting young children [14].

Earlier research recommended to use media or tools to support parents in giving appropriate sex education to children [2], [6]. The use of comics, pictures, cartoons, and audiovisual media were strongly suggested [15]. Those tools were reportedly useful when combined with several learning strategies specifically in sexuality health for young pupils [9].

Visual media, such as picture storybooks, is a powerful tool to disseminate messages. According to Berger, people receive about 80% of information from visual stimuli [16]. Visual media as graphical design may influence an individual's cognitive structure and behavior [17], [18]. In addition, imaginative visual media are suitable for young children because their visual systems are imagistic [19].

There are several imported story books in Indonesia as sexuality health education tools for preschoolers, for example, "Amazing You" by Dr. Gail Saltz and "What Makes a Baby" by Cory Silverberg. They are well illustrated and have short text on each page that is suitable for preschooler's cognitive and language development [20]. Unfortunately, some cultural issues are presented. Previous study findings showed that a comprehensive and culturally sensitive approach in sex health education program is needed [10].

There are two illustration books created by Indonesian writers on these topics that culturally acceptable. First book written by Watiek Ideo, "Aku Anak Berani, Bisa Melindungi Diri Sendiri". The second one titled "Aku dan Diriku Berharga" created by Nova Dhelia and Andillah Utami. They are visually attractive and serve comprehensive information about sexual matters for children. In spite of these advantages, the longer text in these books are not compatible with our young reader's cognitive and language development.

Regarding to this situation, we argue that there is a necessity to provide not only culturally-acceptable but also cognitively-suitable or age-appropriate as sexuality health tools for kids in Indonesia. This research aimed to validate picture storybook we created ("Tubuhku Berharga") as visual media for promoting sexual health for preschoolers.

METHOD

There were three significant processes in this research: (1) Designing media; (2) Content validation; (3) Empirical validation. Visual media we designed in line with the need for sexual health information mastered by preschoolers and the concept of preschoolers' cognitive and language abilities. We wrote a narrative story and hired a professional illustrator to create the illustration. The content refers to [8] consisted of three general topics: (1) Differences between boys and girls; (2) Personal hygiene and health; (3) Legal and illegal contact.

Content validation refers to process in obtaining content validity of the media as part of an intervention program [21]. Some experts were requested to make a judgment about the media we conducted. We had 4 experts with such profiles: 2 clinical psychologists who have expertise in sexual health issues and 2 experts and researchers in developmental psychology. This validation aims to make a judgment whether the media aligns with preschoolers' cognitive and language development and has proper illustrations for kids of that age. After the revision process, we did try out procedures for subjects.

A quasi-experiment procedure was conducted on subjects as an empirical validation method. Quasi-experiment is an experiment procedure in which units are not assigned to conditions randomly [31]. We had one group pretest-posttest design to measure the knowledge differences before and after the storytelling process using the media. The inclusive criteria for this study are kindergarten students that range from 3 to 7 years old, have a good attention span to be involved in a storytelling activity for at least 10 minutes, and have the ability to communicate verbally. The subject of the experiment was preschoolers from a local kindergarten. There are 17 students in the kindergarten but only 9 of them that meet the inclusive criteria. Two teachers and one research assistant were involved in gathering observation data using a behavioral checklist. We observed behaviors and verbal expressions that represent their knowledge about three topics i.e. differences between boys and girls, personal hygiene and health, and legal and illegal contacts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As the initial step, a narrative story was developed according to the information about sexuality needed by preschoolers. The topics, purposes, and narration are described as follows.

Table 1 Content of Picture Story Book "Tubuhku Berharga"

Topics	Purposes	Narration & Illustration
Differences between boy and girl	To show types of gender	Introduction of main characters, a boy and a girl. They differed by tangible physical appearance such as pigtails, name, and attire.
Personal hygiene and health	To educate how to keep individual's hygiene and health (especially at private area)	Narrated by activities to keep one's health such as eating and exercising. Illustrated by toilet training activities. Highlighted that one's body is precious and valuable.
Legal and illegal contacts	To explain safe and unsafe touches. To demonstrate how to become assertive as protection method. To inform concept about trusted adults.	Narrated and illustrated by activities to keep one's safety such as dress up, helped by trusted adults (parents), and speak up.

In addition, to gain parent's awareness in this topic and motivate parents to do simple sexual communication with young children, a brief preface was added. A popular short song for children about safe and unsafe contact was supplemented on the last page of the book.

Content validity was examined by requesting expert's judgement to evaluate the design of the picture story book [22]. Specifically, the relevance of topics, narration, and illustration were assessed by four experts with professional qualifications. Their judgments were analyzed using content validity analysis. It represented Aiken V' score 0.8125-0.9375 with mean 0.855. According to Azwar [23] validity coefficient 0.5 is acceptable. It can be concluded that "Tubuhku Berharga" story book has good content validity.

A quasi-experiment protocol with one group pre-test and posttest design was conducted to assess this media feasibility in educating young children. A group of kindergarten students, 4 boys and 5 girls, was hired to join in the storytelling session. The youngest participant was 4 years and 6 months old, and the eldest was 6 years and 11 months

old. The average age of the participants was 5 years 8 months. A systematic observation using a behavioral checklist was used to gather data between two conditions. The result of storytelling session using “Tubuhku Berharga” picture story book are resumed in this following table.

Table 2 Pre and Post Intervention Condition

Topics	Indicators	Behavior & Verbal Expression	
		Pre-intervention	Post-intervention
Differences between boy and girl	Participant can describe the different features of both sexes	✓ Participants mentioned their girl and boy friends' names, explained that girls usually wear hijab to cover their head.	✓ Participants mentioned physical features of book's characters (“Putri has pigtails, she wears skirt”)
Personal hygiene and health	Participant can mention their body parts including private parts	✓ Participants mentioned their visible/ uncovered body parts such as eyes, hair, and hands. Private parts are not included.	✓ Participants mentioned their visible/ uncovered body parts such as eyes, hair, and hands. Only “butt” as private parts verbally expressed.
	Participants can describe activities to maintain personal hygiene and health such as eating and exercising.	✓ Participants mentioned healthy menu such as spinach, meat, and apples.	✓ Participants mentioned not only healthy foods, but also favorite exercise, such as riding bike. Toilet activities were not mentioned.
	Participants can describe full-dress for both sexes and its function.	✓ Participants mentioned clothes for different sexes, such as trousers for boys, hijab and skirts for girls.	-Participants were informed that everyone should wear clothes properly to protect their private parts. There was no observed behavior and verbal expression about this information.
Legal and illegal contacts	Participants can mention safe and unsafe touches	-There was no observed behavior and verbal expression about this subtopic.	✓ Participants pointed private areas should be protected that covered by underwear. Verbal expressions were limited, e.g. “don't touch butt and pee zone”.
	Participant can role play assertive action in uncomfortable situation	- There was no observed behavior and verbal expression about this topic.	✓ Participants acted as if in uncomfortable situation by screaming e.g. “help”, “don't”, “(call) Papa/ Mamma” and running. Verbal expressions of uncomfortable situation were not presented.
	Participant can differ trusted adults and strangers in their environment by mentioning them.	✓ Participants mentioned their closest adult figures, such as father, mother, elder brother/ sister, caregivers, and teachers. Those figures were perceived as trusted. Adult strangers were not verbally expressed.	✓ Participants mentioned their closest adult figures, such as father, mother, elder brother/ sister, caregivers, and teachers. Those figures were perceived as trusted. Participants were given example of strangers, “ojek driver”. There was limited response of this information.

As seen in the table above, there were some remarkable changes in almost all of the indicators of the served topics. It can be inferred that the picture storybook “Tubuhku Berharga” has sufficient empirical validity.

Individual’s knowledge about their sexuality may affect their long-term well-being. It may prevent them from performing risky sexual behavior or becoming vulnerable subject of sexual assault. Proper sexual education can be given by parents and teachers as early as possible.

Even though early childhood educators agree and understand the urgency of doing sex education at an early stage, some factors i.e. the lack of knowledge regarding the themes, limited educational materials, and a negative perception of sexual topics are perceived as significant obstacles [32]. Therefore, specific educational tools for promoting healthy sexuality and personal safety should be developed to help parents and teachers communicate such awkward topics as this. Good educational tools should be culturally acceptable and cognitively appropriate for users [24]. According to Piaget’s cognitive theory, preschoolers are in the pre-operational cognitive phase, characterized by the ability of children to represent the world with words, images, and drawings [20]. During preschool years, language development is increasing significantly. Moreover, Shihab [25] stated that preschoolers have an attention span about 7-10 minutes to do an activity without distraction, vocabulary ranged about 1,500-14,000 words. The ability to produce a more structured sentences using 5-7 words is developed, as well. By considering those cognitive and language milestone, we composed brief narration on each page and make sure that overall books could be read within 10 minutes. The illustration of the main character’s physical features was adjusted to the real physical features of preschoolers. In the early childhood phase, the human body are slimmed down as the trunks of the body length. Heads are still somewhat large for the bodies, making the top-heavy look in overall proportion [20].

It is feasible in liberal-approach countries to communicate sexual topics openly [26] On the other hand, it remains controversial in other cultural settings, including in Indonesia [15]. Culture-appropriateness was part of the consideration in formulating sentences and illustrating situations in this picture storybook.

Topics presented in the book were formulated by considering information needed by young children. According to Hartati [8] preschoolers need to know the difference between

male and female, personal hygiene and health, and legal and illegal contacts. In our research, those topics are not only presented in narration but also in visual illustration. Recent studies elucidated the effectiveness of using visual media in communicating information to young children [18], [27].

Based on our research, picture story book “Tubuhku Berharga” has good content validity. The Aiken V’ score range from 0.8125-0.9375 with mean 0.855. Azwar stated that Aiken V’ coefficient 0.5 is already acceptable [23]. Compared with previous studies on the same theme, this study provides concrete and valid material to be used by parents and educators. Meanwhile, the previous studies only elaborate themes that should be provided in sex education materials i.e introduction of self-identity, introduction of gender, male and female relationship, introduction of reproductive organs and its function, how to maintain health, and skills to protect themselves from sexual violence [32], [33].

The experiment stage was conducted to examine the empirical validity of the book. Some students already had prior knowledge about differences between sexes. Older students were able to verbally explain about it. They mentioned the names of classmates and categorized them as boys or girls precisely. They also simply described the different attire worn by different sexes. Yet, younger pupils may have had limitations in expressing their ideas verbally. This is understandable due to the difference in participant’s age, cognitive, and language aspects. 4-5 years old children might have about 1,500 vocabularies and can produce 3-5 words in a sentence. Meanwhile older preschoolers might have 10,000-14,000 vocabs and create more structured sentences using 5-7 words [25].

Almost all of the participants can mention their body parts. Nevertheless, we observed expressions of hesitation in describing private parts. “Butt” is the only private part verbally expressed. In several cultural settings, openly mentioning sex parts is categorized as inappropriate behavior. Children may receive punishment for doing it. That is also the reason parents tend to use other terms in explaining private parts to children [28].

The remarkable change was the increasing knowledge about safe and unsafe contact and how to avoid the uncomfortable situation. It is a significant topic in avoiding sexual abuse to children [15], [8]. Participants could not verbally express the uncomfortable situation that may occur, but they are running and screaming, pretended in such dangerous situation or attacked by strangers. Participants were able to identify trusted adults such as parents and teachers, but had limitations in identifying strangers. The last part of the book

facilitated students to gain new information about safe and unsafe touches through song. As initial studies suggested that singing and dancing were one of effective techniques in educating preschool students about sexual health [9]. By examining the overall changing in participants' behavior and verbal expression, it can be concluded that this book is valid as sexual education media for preschoolers.

Nevertheless, this study had several limitations. We conducted one group pretest and posttest quasi-experimental design to examine the tool's empirical validity. That design was widely criticized as a poor research design due to the threat to internal validity and external validity. It is recommended to have a control group with random assignment to examine the effectiveness of a module or intervention [29]. We also should elaborate on the prior knowledge of the participants. Self-report from parents might be clearer than teacher's notes. The other limitation is the fact that this picture storybook cannot stand alone. It means the effectiveness depends on parents' skills in delivering the material. However, it is still useful to begin a discussion with young children.

The prevention of sexual abuse is the main concern in this tool. It does not facilitate other topics regarding sexual health such as biological aspects. Children's curiosity about their reproductive organs may be represented in their preschool age. According to Freud's psychosexual theory, during phallic phase (about 3-6 years old) children tend to show curiosity about their private parts and aware about the differences between males and female [20]. Therefore, their question about where babies come from becomes unavoidable. Other education tools should be developed to facilitate this natural curiosity.

Repetition is the key factor in sex education success. Marathon might be the best analogy of educating children, including the sexuality theme. Therefore, parents should be knowledgeable and skillful in giving age-appropriate sex education for their children [30], [28].

CONCLUSION

The picture storybook "Tubuhku Berharga" is valid as sex education media for children. This book may be used as an age-appropriate and culture-sensitive tool specifically to prevent sexual abuse on young children. We suggested constructing other visual media

with other topics in sexuality health, such as reproduction and body image that are age-suitable for preschoolers.

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DECLARATION

The contribution of Author 1 is responsible for the entire research project. Author 1 also led the manuscript writing and collaborated with Author 2. Author 2 participated in data collection, transcription, and analysis. They also revised the manuscript. All authors have approved the final manuscript.

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Conflict of Interest

All authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Additional Information

No additional information is available for this paper.

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